

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members
 Travis County Commissioners Court
FROM: Adrienne Sturup, Interim Director *Adrienne Sturup*
 Desmar Walkes, MD, Health Authority/Medical Director
DATE: September 8, 2021
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Update

This memorandum serves as an update to the Mayor, Council Members, and members of the Travis County Commissioners Court regarding staff efforts to date on the COVID-19 pandemic testing and vaccine distribution. The Austin Public Health (APH) Epidemiology and Public Health Preparedness (PHEP) Division continues to monitor and respond to the community's needs in the Austin, Travis County area. The following update is for the week ending September 4, 2021.

Trends in Cases, Hospitalizations, and Deaths

Cases

As of September 3, 2021, a total of 105,988 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Travis County have been reported to Austin Public Health. Cases continue to decline, with the seven-day moving average case count being 59 new cases per day for the week of September 4, 2021. The decline in case counts started on August 29, 2021. (Figure 1).

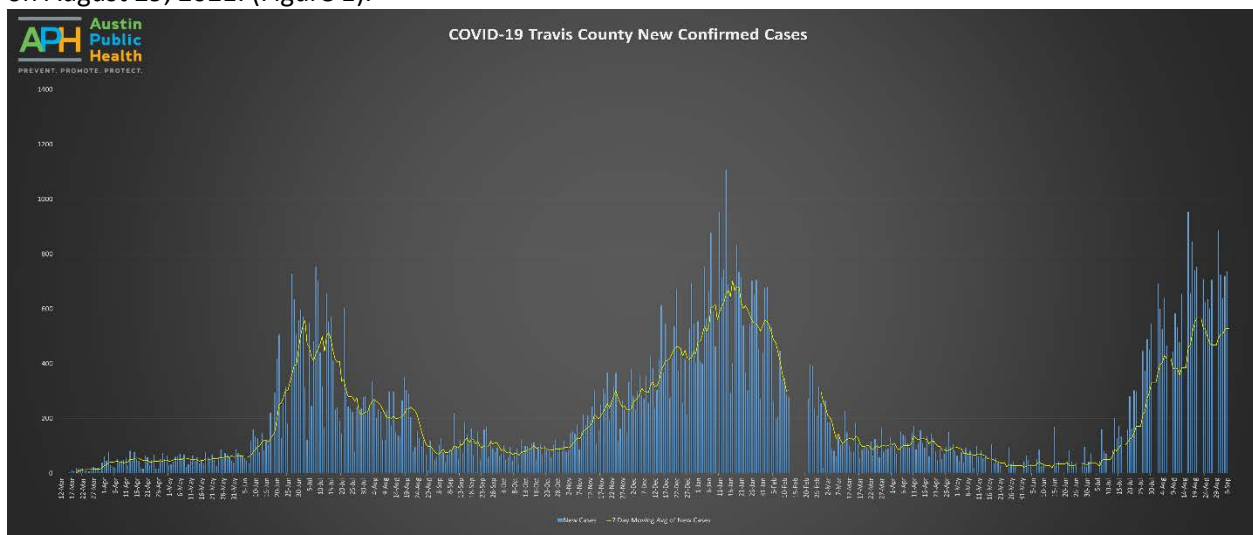


Figure 1. Newly Confirmed COVID-19 Cases by Date, Travis County, as of September 4, 2021

The peak for the 7-day average of new cases in the current surge was on August 21, 2021, with 565 new cases. Vaccination efforts and the practicing protective measures by Austin residents have led to a relative plateau in the number of new cases. However, this recent surge is a reminder of how the virus can quickly spread to unvaccinated populations. Those who are not vaccinated should continue to use masks and get the vaccine to protect against COVID-19 and its variants. COVID-19 vaccines are considered to be largely

protective against the Delta variant. Officials with the World Health Organization (WHO) have recently stressed the need for fully vaccinated people to keep up with social distancing measures and to mask in light of the Delta variant.

Hospital Admissions

The seven-day rolling average of hospital admissions decreased from 77 per day on August 28, 2021, to 59 as of September 4, 2021 (Figure 2). The staffed ICU bed capacity has been exceeded during this time as patients requiring ICU care have increased. Almost all of the patients requiring ICU care for COVID-19 are unvaccinated.

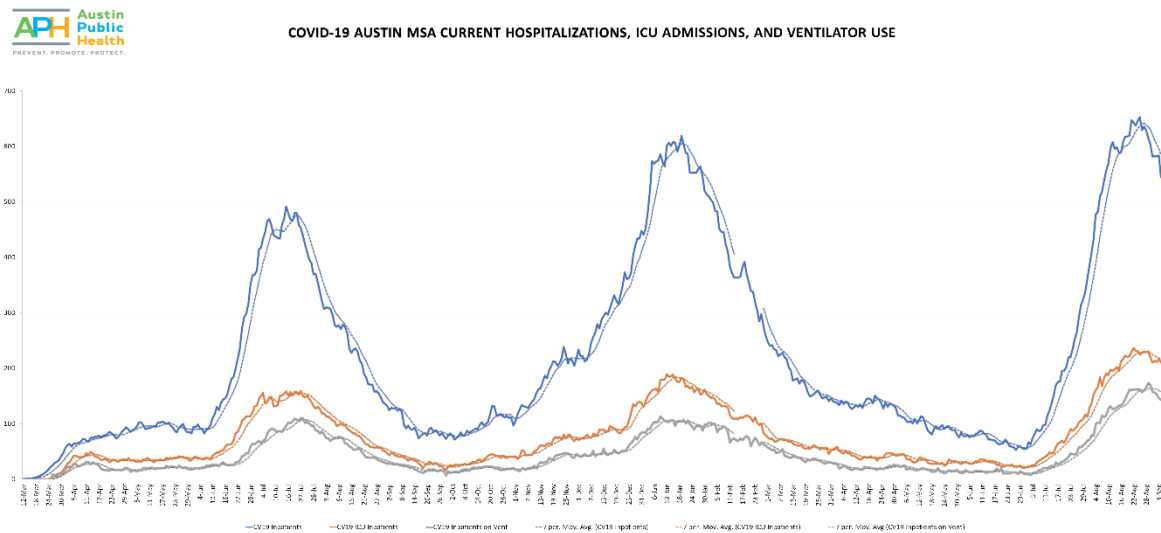
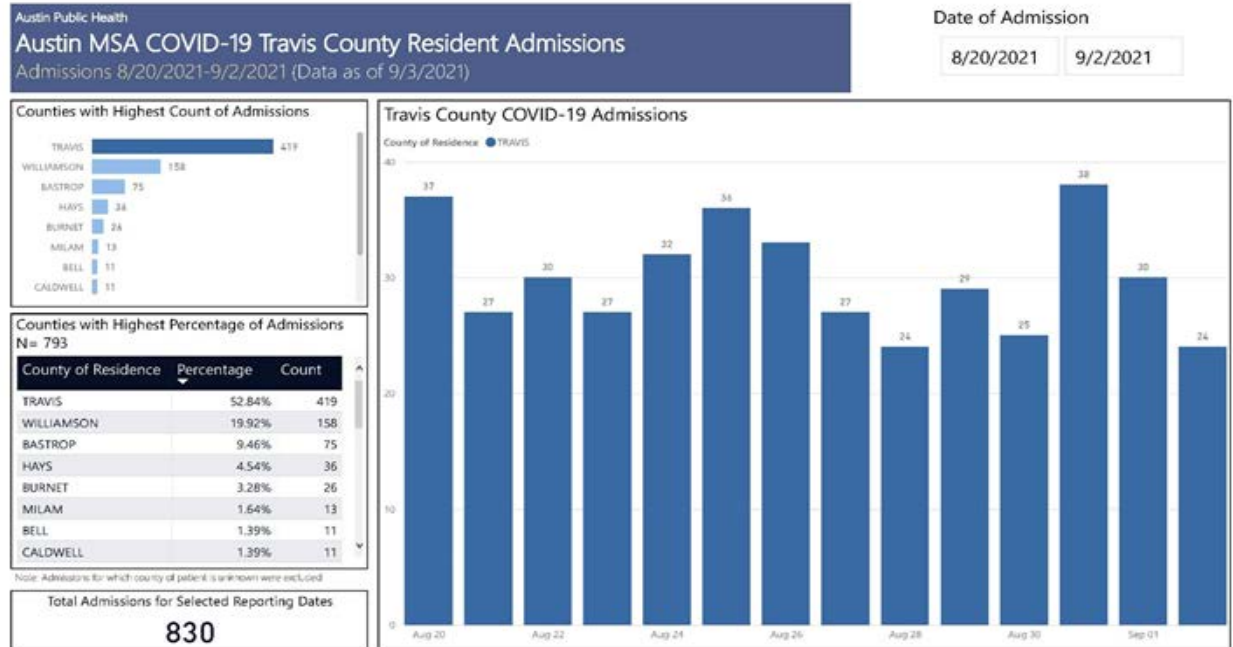


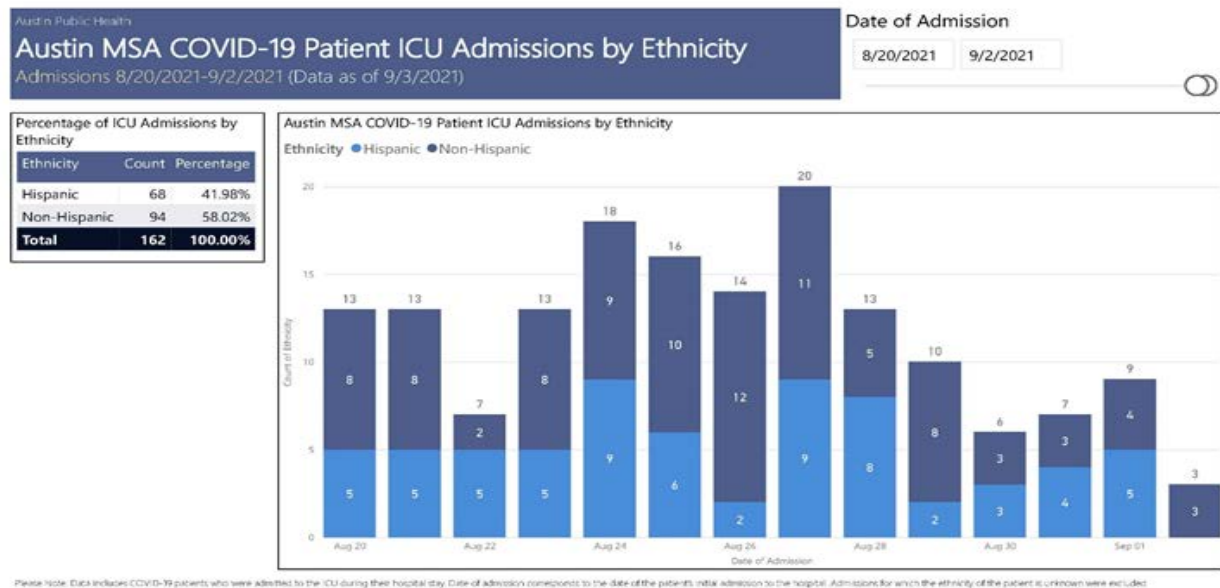
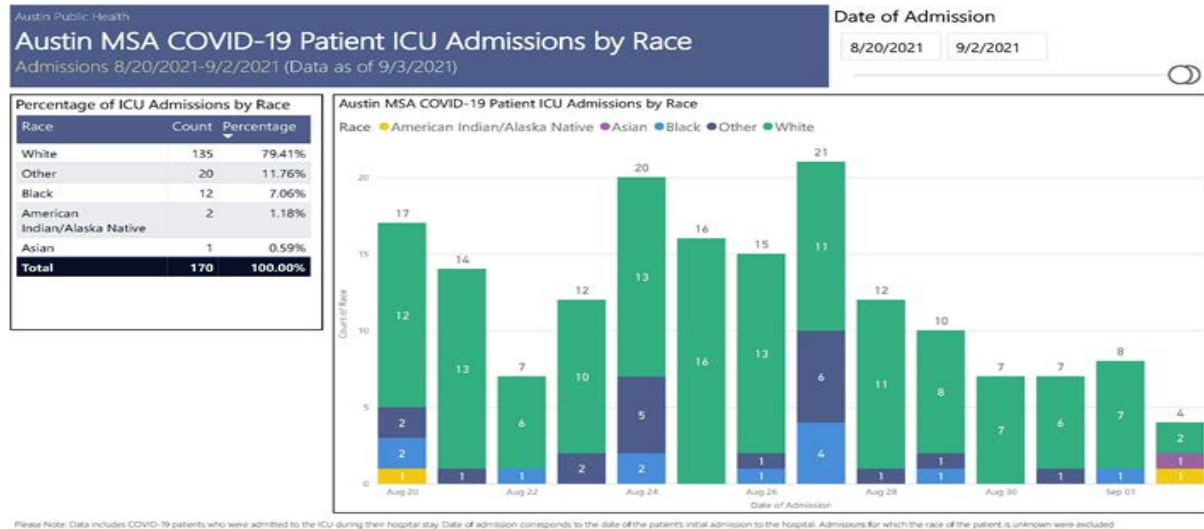
Figure 2. COVID-19 Hospitalizations, ICU Admissions and Ventilator Use, Austin MSA, as of September 4, 2021

New Admissions by County of Residence



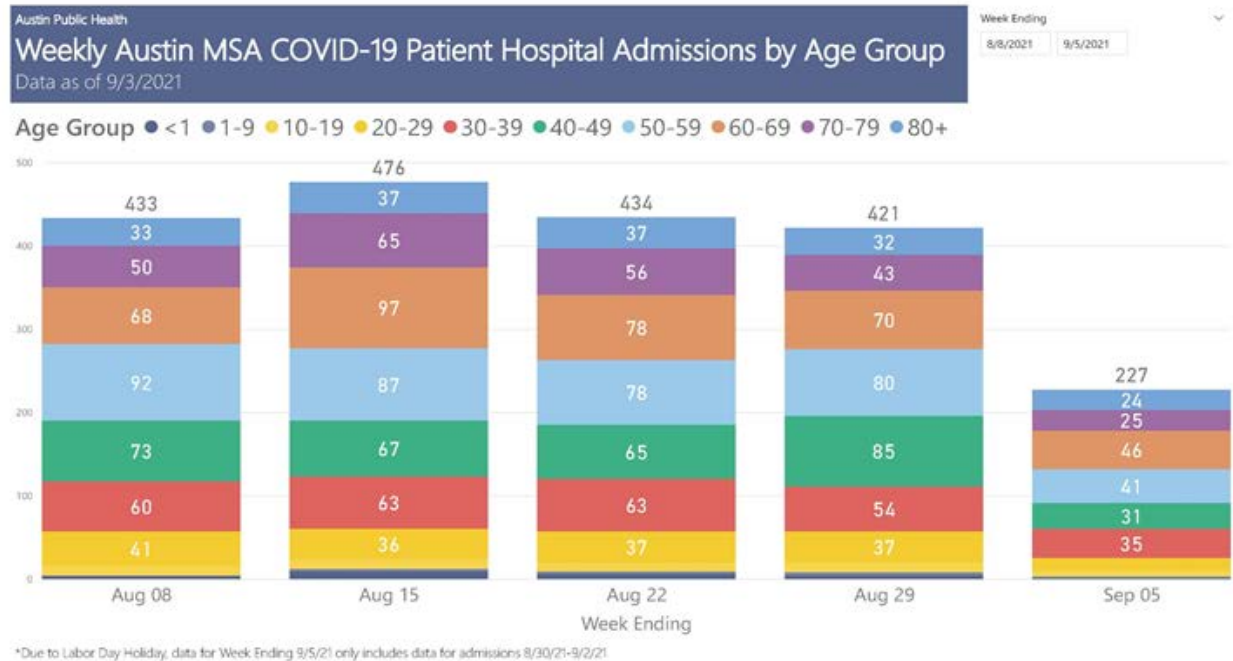
The majority of admissions to area hospitals come from Travis County, with Williamson County coming in second.

Hospitalizations by Race and Ethnicity



Review of the hospitalizations by race and ethnicity shows the disproportionate numbers of Hispanics and Blacks being affected by COVID-19 throughout this pandemic.

Hospitalizations by Age Group



There has been a 46% reduction in the number of admissions during the week ending September 5, 2021.

Deaths

Since January 2021, Austin Public Health has received 408 reports of laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 deaths among Travis County residents. Of those who died, 50.5% were Hispanic, and 57.8% were male. Twenty-five persons, or 6.13%, were reported to have been fully vaccinated. These are the highest percentages according to age, race, and vaccination status.

The number of deaths reported during July and August increased as individuals cared for in ICU on ventilators require extended lengths of stay, and many who were unvaccinated succumbed to COVID-19 and died. There were 408 deaths in 2021. There have been a total of 981 deaths throughout the pandemic.

Positivity Rate

Travis County's positivity rate continues to decline and is 10.6%.

Variant Surveillance

APH Epidemiologists receive notification of variants from both the state and from UT-University Health Services. Cases are tracked by epidemiologists and investigated, with completed worksheets being sent to the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

	Total confirmed cases	# Deaths	# Hospitalized ¹
Variant of Concern²			
B.1.1.7 (Alpha)	238	0	3
B.1.351 (Beta)	1	0	0
B.1.617.2 (Delta)	48	1	4
B.1.427 (Epsilon)	5	0	0
B.1.429 (Epsilon)	49	0	0
P.1 (Gamma)	8	0	0
Total	349	1	7
Variant of Interest²			
B.1.525 (Eta)	1	0	0
B.1.526 (Iota)	5	0	0
Total	6	0	0

¹ Of those for whom hospitalization status was known

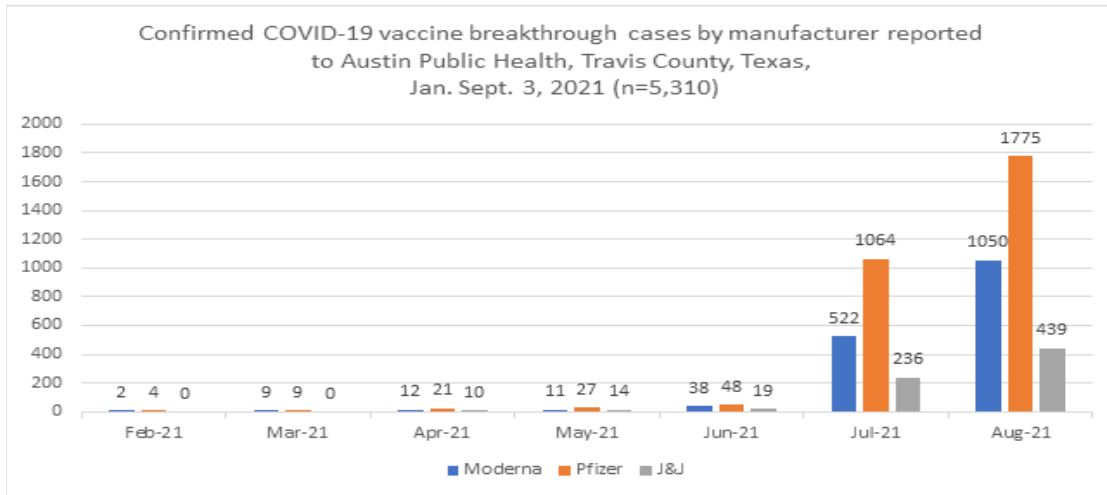
²[SARS-CoV-2 Variant Classifications and Definitions \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/sars-cov-2/variant-classifications-and-definitions)

Total number of Travis County cases sequenced is unknown

- 59% female
- Age range 6-94 years old, median age = 22 years
- Five case-patients reported foreign travel (Mexico-2, UK-1, Dubai-1, Brazil-1)

Vaccine Breakthrough Cases

Fully vaccinated cases are tracked and investigated. Surveillance worksheet is completed and sent to DSHS, along with a request for sequencing for those cases that result in hospitalization or death.



Of

5,310 confirmed breakthrough cases, symptom status was known for 1,220 case-patients. Of those, 88% were symptomatic.

- 54 patients were hospitalized for COVID-related reasons:
 - 24 females, 30 males
 - Age range 21-96 years old, median 73 years old
 - 13 received Janssen, 16 received Moderna, and 25 received Pfizer.
- 25 COVID-19 deaths were reported among the confirmed cases.
 - 11 males, 14 females
 - Age range 32-98 years old, median 77 years
 - 7 were residents at LTCF
 - 15 received Pfizer, 8 received Moderna, and 2 received Janssen.

Of note: Healthcare providers and nursing home residents were vaccinated with Pfizer starting December 2020. Nursing home residents and staff are frequently tested even if asymptomatic. This report only includes breakthrough cases reported to APH.

Reinfections

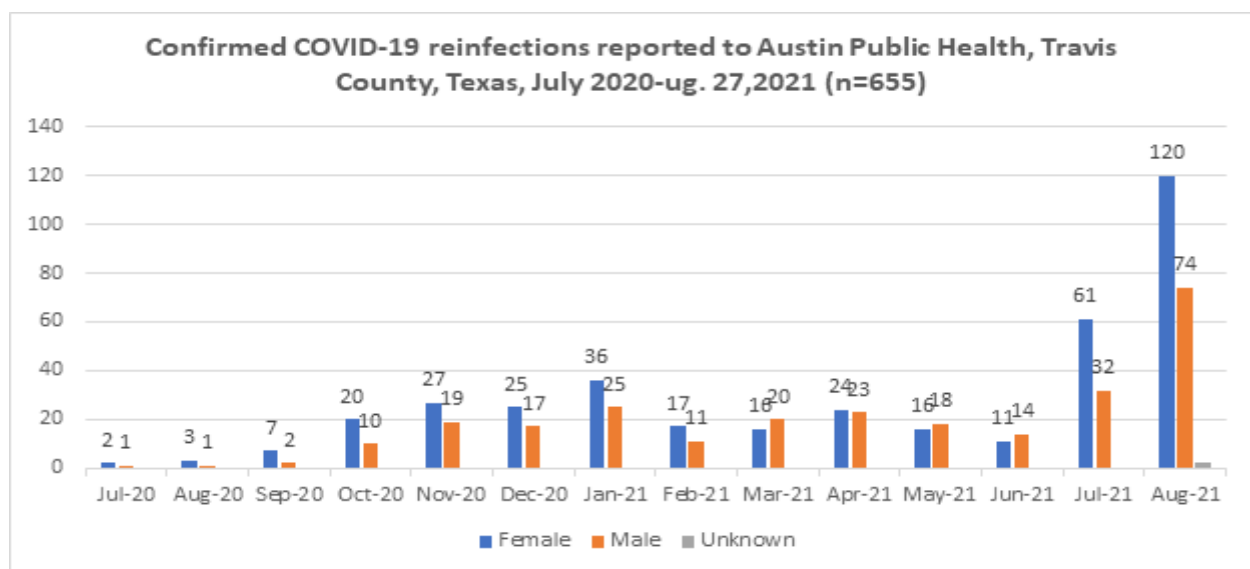
Reinfections refer to confirmed cases that meet the DSHS case definition for a COVID-19 reinfection (a repeat positive test for SARS-CoV-2 RNA using a molecular amplification detection test more than 90 days after the initial report; cases that are persistently positive and asymptomatic, such as those with repeat positive tests occurring within the 90-day timeframe, are not considered reinfections.)

COVID-19 Confirmed Reinfections

	COVID-19 Confirmed Reinfections			
	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
Hospitalized	19	29	0	48
Deaths, COVID-	1	1	0	2
Age group				
< 30	109	160	2	271

30-39	51	88	0	139
40-49	34	45	0	79
50-59	35	52	0	87
60-69	23	20	0	43
70-79	9	9	0	18
80+	7	11	0	18
ALL	268	385	2	655

*Month refers to date of laboratory specimen collection for second (reinfection) confirmed case



Vaccine Updates

The COVID-19 vaccine response has evolved over the last several months. Back in January, APH was designated a statewide hub. APH was required to vaccinate according to state eligibility requirements and provide vaccines to all Texas residents. As vaccines have become more widely available, operations have changed from mass vaccination sites to support the hub designation to additional community based throughout Travis County to support accessibility in historically marginalized communities.

APH also launched a mobile vaccine team and worked with community partners to develop community-based pop-up clinics. These pop-up clinics are responsive to residents who could not get to other vaccine locations and to make vaccines more accessible in community-based settings such as schools, worksites, affordable housing complexes, and marketplaces.

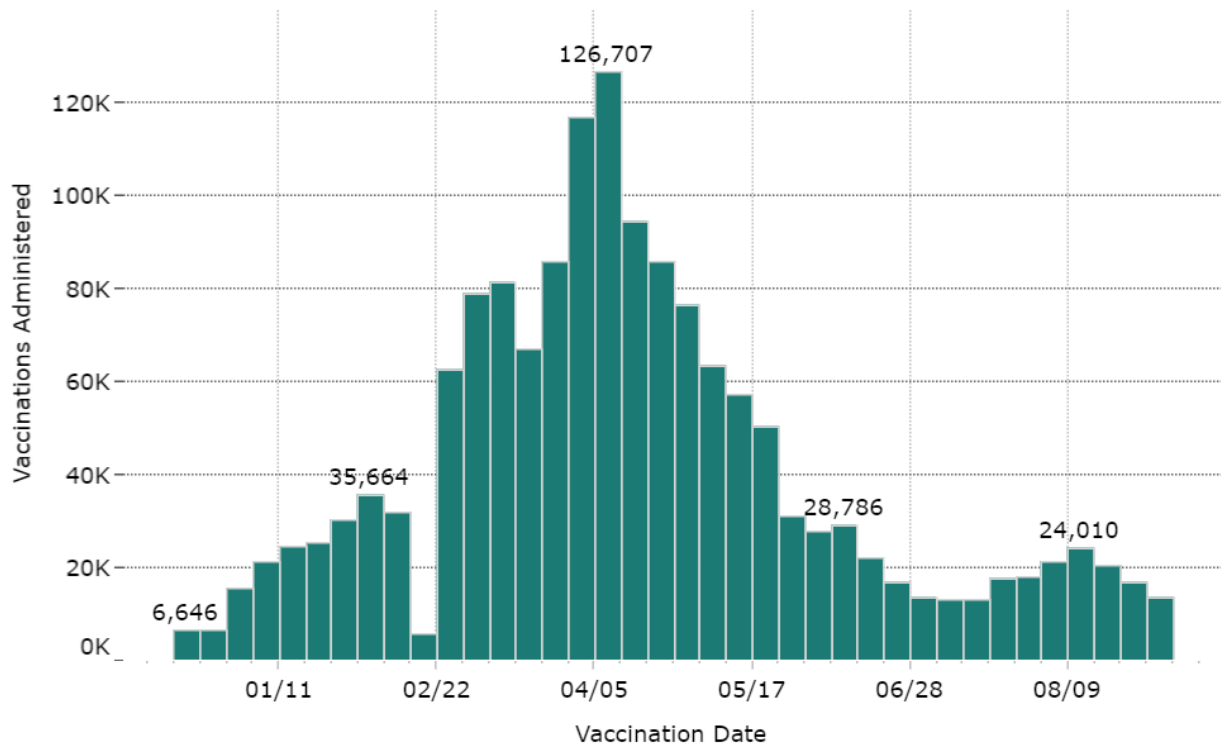
APH also provides vaccines to the uninsured and underinsured patient population through the APH Immunizations Clinics and Refugee Clinic.

1,546,643 vaccines have been administered in Travis County as of September 6, 2021.

68.04% of the eligible Travis County population 12 and older are fully vaccinated. 58.06% of the Statewide eligible population is fully vaccinated.

The table below shows all provider vaccine distribution in Travis County over time according to DSHS.

Vaccinations by Week in Travis County



APH is one of over 300 vaccine providers. According to DSHS, as of September 6, 2021, the majority of the vaccines distributed have been through pharmacy outlets, as depicted in the graph below. This would include HEB, Walgreens, CVS, Wal-Mart, Sam's Club, etc.

Doses Administered by Organization Type

Emergency Services	48,167
Health Center (Community, Federally Qualified, Migrant, Rural)	55,253
Hospital	264,684
Long-Term Care	150
Medical Clinic/Doctor's Office	149,777
Public Health/Government	302,725
Pharmacy	678,129
Other	47,758

The table below shows vaccine distribution by race/ethnicity in Travis County, updated as of 9/6/2021.

Race	Total Census Population	Estimated Eligible Population (12+)	People Vaccinated with at Least One Dose (Texas DSHS) as of 9/06/2021	People Vaccinated with at Least One Dose Percent	Percent Increase Since 8/29	People Fully Vaccinated (Texas DSHS) of 9/06/2021	People Fully Vaccinated Percent	Percent Increase Since 8/29
Asian	83,467	71,782	63,228	88.08%	0.09% (66)	57,048	79.47%	0.30% (212)
Black or African American	104,003	88,403	35,089	39.69%	0.43% (382)	28,964	32.76%	0.70% (616)
Hispanic or Latino	442,687	349,723	194,398	55.59%	1.10% (3,836)	158,664	45.37%	1.38% (4,814)
White	608,874	541,898	372,830	68.80%	0.16% (848)	334,002	61.64%	0.37% (2,029)
Other	34,523	24,857	133,440	*		112,775	*	
Unknown			63,879			52,053		
Total	1,273,554	1,076,661	862,864	80.14%	0.70% (7,570)	743,506	69.06%	1.01% (10,896)

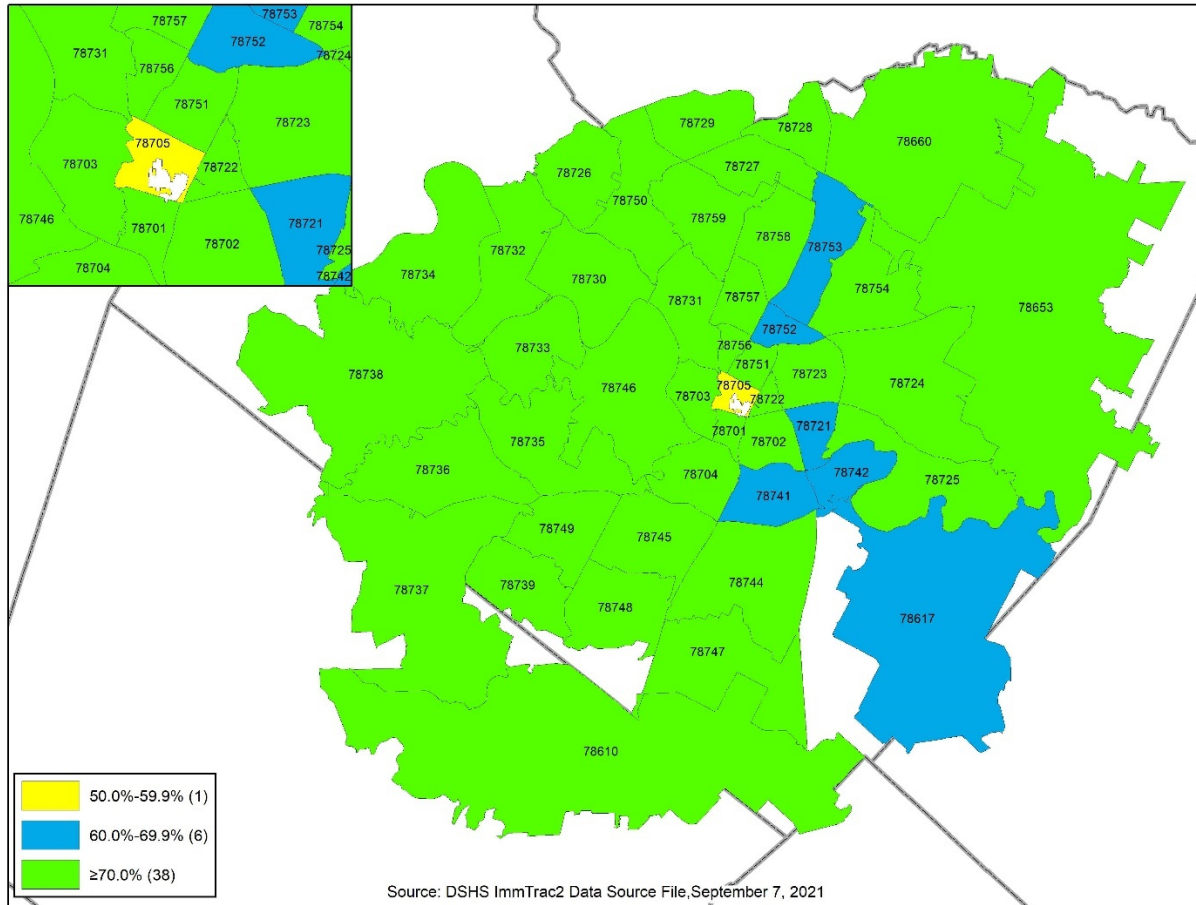
The total vaccinated population is from the DSHS data as of September 7, 2021. This data is in the table below, representing total vaccines provided to all county residents by all reporting providers by age. Note the 12-15-year-old population represents about 60,441 of the total 1,092,827 eligible population.

Age	Doses Administered	People Vaccinated with at least One Dose	People Fully Vaccinated
12-15 years	75,729	43,085	32,652
16-49 years	945,665	532,040	453,926
50-64 years	307,854	170,047	150,819
65-79 years	176,955	95,476	86,680
80+ years	39,986	21,846	19,334
Unknown	454	370	95
Total	1,546,643	862,864	743,506

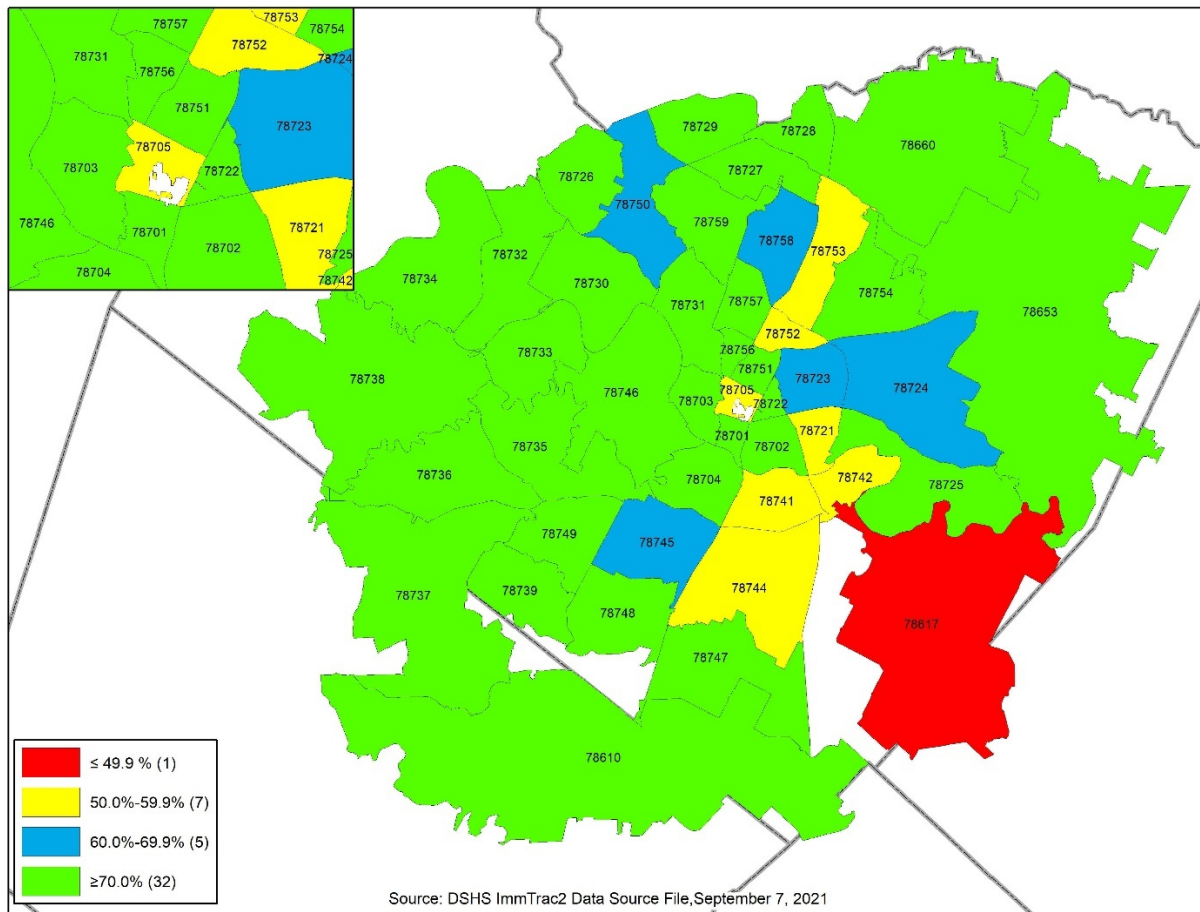
71.28% of Travis County Residents aged 12-15 have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. This is a 29% increase from the end of June (as of June 27, only 41% of this age group had received 1st dose). 54.0% are fully vaccinated.

APH also tracks vaccine uptake by zip code to inform vaccine operations and works to align with the national goal of at least one vaccine dose for 70% of adults by July 4, 2021. This goal was reached as of July 7th, 2021. The map below provides a gauge for our progress toward reaching this target by zip code.

The number of vaccinated first dose penetration by zip code—data sources: DSHS COVID-19 Vaccine by Zip Code and 2018 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates. Note: Map source data has been updated to improve projected accuracy. The map provided in the June 15 memo and June 22 presentation was inconsistent with initial source documentation.



Fully vaccinated rate for Travis County is 68.04% as of September 7th. A goal of APH was to achieve 70% of eligible population fully vaccinated county-wide by September 1, 2021. The map below demonstrates this progress by zip code.



Vaccine Incentives Pilot

APH launched an incentives pilot to encourage vaccines among those that were unvaccinated. Eligible persons had to get a 1st or 2nd dose vaccine at a participating APH vaccine clinic and complete an online survey. APH distributed 2000 gift cards at the cost of \$100,000. Patients were required to complete a preliminary survey to receive the incentive. This preliminary survey asked respondents a series of questions about the quality of APH services at the vaccine site.

Preliminary data shows that at least 94% of over 600 respondents found that the quality of the APH appointment line, clinic check-in process, and nurse interactions were rated “Good” or “Very Good.” Responses to the question “Why did you decide to get vaccinated today?” emphasized the convenience of APH clinic locations, community fears due to the current state of the pandemic, and the desire of patients to protect their family and their community.

APH is conducting an additional survey to gather information on vaccine hesitancy and health to inform further outreach and education efforts.

APH is using the results from the most recent survey on Vaccine Hesitancy conducted by Sendero Health to inform planning. Sendero survey data showed 9.3% (n=53) reported not receiving at least one dose of



the COVID-19 vaccine. Of that, 28.3% (n=15) said “yes,” they plan to get the vaccine, while 71.7% (n=38) said “no,” “not sure,” or “preferred not to say.” Of those who say “no,” more than half say nothing can be done to change their mind to “yes.”

Focus on Equity

Austin Public Health continues to assess vaccine hesitancy and gaps in vaccine distribution. Data indicates that in addition to gaps in geographic reach, younger age groups and populations of color are not reaching the 70% fully vaccinated goal.

APH continues to meet people where they are and provide outreach through trusted sources at the neighborhood level. Our strategy is data-driven and is community-informed. We review where there has been limited vaccine uptake, higher rates of death and disease, and community feedback to guide vaccine operations. There were 1,276 vaccines administered last week, including two pop-up locations: Harmony Science Academy (29) and Leander ISD Technology Building (105). Additionally, there were 529 vaccines administered through the Mobile Vaccination Program.

Vaccine efforts are paired with boots-on-the-ground educational programs to engage vaccine-hesitant populations to answer questions and address concerns on site. APH partners with trusted community sources to inform and host clinics, provide education sessions, distribute PPE, and conduct outreach.

APH continues to build on current outreach efforts with partners the community trusts and released a solicitation to contract to provide additional resources.

Vaccine THIRD dose and Boosters

APH is planning for increased demand for vaccines due to the latest CDC recommendations for third doses and boosters. APH is adding clinic locations and opening a mass vaccine location to accommodate boosters and promote vaccines to those still unvaccinated.

Current clinics and mobile operations are providing THIRD doses to those that meet the CDC criteria. APH clinical operations provide both mRNA (Pfizer and Moderna) vaccines authorized for a third dose.

APH is incorporating the third dose and booster messaging into communications and outreach efforts. The APH call center is directly calling hard to reach patient populations that meet Third dose criteria to reduce barriers and offer appointments. Upon CDC authorization, APH will contact APH COVID-19 vaccine patients to remind them of the 8-month booster schedule through a direct text, email, or phone call. Patients will be offered an appointment with APH and given information on where vaccine is available throughout the community should they prefer to get vaccine from another provider.

APH is increasing call center capacity and has updated the online scheduler to facilitate access to appointments. Additionally, APH will maintain walk-up unscheduled appointments at clinics sites as much as possible to accommodate patients.

Mobile operations will incorporate boosters into operational plans.



APH will continue to monitor operations and will adjust as needed.

At this time, anyone seeking a THIRD dose can contact 311 to schedule an appointment.

Focused Outreach and Messaging

The Health Equity Task Force continues to work with the Vaccine Incident Management Team (IMT) to bring vaccine resources to zip codes not at the 70% fully vaccinated goal. Outreach events continue to be an important tool to support protective behaviors, meet basic needs and provide information about the vaccine.

Summary of Previous Outreach Events

Fiesta Grocery Store

Wednesday, September 1, 2021, from 9 am - 11 am

Distributed information about vaccines to over 75 individuals.

Upcoming Outreach Events

East Austin Neighborhood Center

Saturday, September 11, 2021 from 9am - 1pm

PPE and Food Distribution

Turner Roberts Recreation Center

Saturday, September 18, 2021, from 9 am – 1 pm

COVID –19 vaccines and PPE distribution

COVID –19 vaccines and PPE distribution Valle Opportunity Center

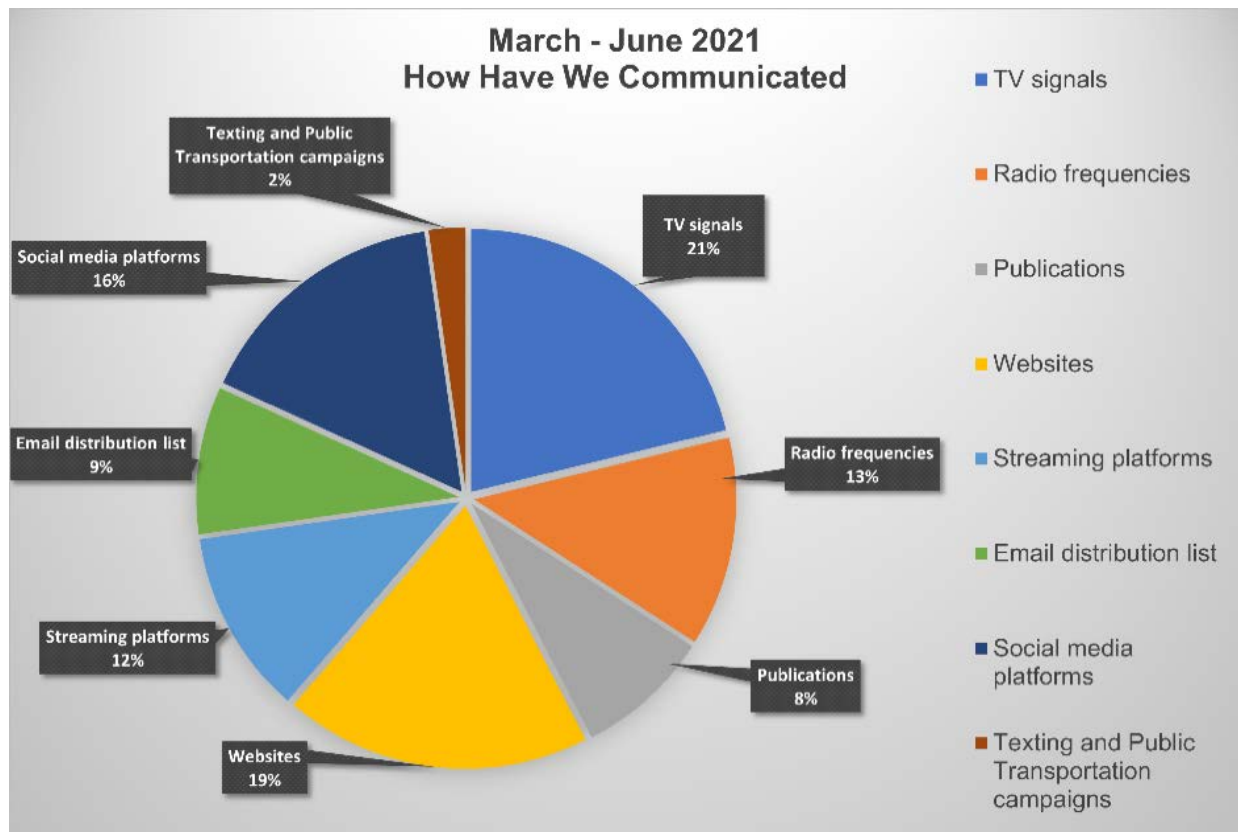
Saturday, September 25, 2021 from 9am - 1pm

COVID –19 vaccines and PPE distribution

Austin Public Health is also working to promote vaccines using focused messaging and paid advertising, and leveraging partnerships. For example, Austin Public Health partnered with Travis County, Central Health, and CommUnityCare to launch the “Let’s Stick Together” initiative on June 28. The initiative aims to achieve the community-focused goal of 70% of eligible Travis County residents receiving at least one dose of the vaccine by July 4th and 70% of residents fully vaccinated by Labor Day. Other organizations were involved in contributing to the initiative, including Ascension Seton, Austin Independent School District, Baylor Scott & White, Capital Metro, Dell Medical School, Del Valle Independent School District, Integral Care, Lone Star Circle of Care, People’s Community Clinic, St. David’s HealthCare, St. David’s Foundation, and the University of Texas at Austin.

As part of the “Let’s Stick Together” initiative, Austin Public Health, Travis County, and Central Health are placing targeted advertising on radio, in print, and online in both Spanish and English. Austin Public Health has utilized television signals, radio frequencies, publications, websites, streaming platforms, email distribution lists, social media platforms, texting, and public transportation for paid advertising efforts.

Through these efforts, 135,012,890 impressions (the times our content has been seen) have been among the Hispanic/Latinx community, 129,633,658 impressions among the Black/African American community, and 3,253,077 impressions among the Asian American/Pacific Islander community.



Current Communications Strategies

- Promoting walk-up and pop-up vaccination events, with paid radio promotions and paid social media and texting that is zip code geofenced to the area in which vaccines are being provided.
- Encouraging people to prepare for summer travel by getting vaccinated, including information that it takes two weeks after the second shot for Pfizer and Moderna or two weeks after the single-shot Johnson & Johnson to be considered fully vaccinated.
- Providing the Equity Task Force educational materials to address hesitancy and combat misinformation. Content includes educational materials to address community feedback such as concerns with infertility, severe side effects, and how the vaccine works with your body to protect you from disease.
- Continuing to encourage proper hygiene (washing your hands, not touching your face, wearing a mask if unvaccinated, immunocompromised, etc.) as well as information on testing and quarantine if you develop COVID-19 symptoms.

Testing Update

Since late summer, demand for COVID-19 testing increased within the community, overwhelming mobile testing capacity that remained available. Austin Public Health opened two new static test sites to improve access across the community, meet the growing demand, and understand and inform the spread of COVID-19. Since the opening of the two sites, an average of 3,500 people have been tested each week.



There are current plans to expand operations to two more locations to provide locations throughout the city and county. Additionally, mobile (facility and home) testing continues to be available.

During August 2021, APH administered 15,644 tests for COVID-19. Since the start of 2021, 66,301 tests have been administered, totaling 189,960 to date. Austin Public Health continues to evaluate the community's needs and the spread of COVID-19 in order to provide services as situations change and develop.

Static Testing

- Austin Public Health currently has two testing locations. Testing is available with or without an appointment. However, scheduling an appointment is recommended to save time on-site and confirm test availability for a given day.
- Schedule online at <http://covid19.austintexas.gov> or by calling 3-1-1 or 512-974-2000. As with all APH testing sites, the services are free.
- Static test site capacity is 5,900 tests per week. Approximately 60% of the testing capacity is currently being used.
 - **George Morales Dove Springs Recreation Center** (Walk-In Site)
 - 5801 Ainez Dr, Austin, Texas 78744
 - Tuesday, Wednesday, 3–7 pm, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 8 am-2 pm.
 - **St. Johns Testing Site** (Drive-Through site)
 - 7211 N Interstate 35 Frontage Rd, Austin, Texas 78752
 - Tuesday-Saturday, 8 am-2 pm.
 - **Pleasant Valley** (First Responders only)
 - Continues to providing testing by appointment only.

Mobile Testing

Mobile (facility and home) testing continues to be in demand. Many facilities have contracted with private entities for testing. However, APH continues to offer testing services as needed. In August, APH provided testing to 3 facilities. August 2021 was the highest monthly total for home testing to date. 413 tests were administered.

Mobile testing will continue by appointment only

- (Monday- Friday 8 am - 4 pm).
- Mobile testing appointments can be made by calling 512-972-5560.

		8/30	8/31	9/1	9/2	9/3	9/4
St. John's	Tu-Sa 8a-2p	--	623	569	451	403	453
Dove Springs	Tu/Th 3p-7p W/F/Sa 8a-2p	--	260	227	171	194	204
Home Testing	By Appointment Only	9	15	20	12	19	--
Facilities Testing	By Appointment Only	--	--	--	--	60	--
Daily Total		9	898	816	634	676	657
Weekly Total		3690					

The safety and health of our community remain a top priority for Austin Public Health. We will continue to abide by our mission to Prevent disease, Promote Health, and Protect the well-being of all.



If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Desmar Walkes, Health Authority at Desmar.Walkes@austintexas.gov, or Interim Director, Adrienne Sturup at Adrienne.Sturup@austintexas.gov.

Cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Anne Morgan, Interim Deputy City Manager
Stephanie Hayden-Howard, Assistant City Manager
Sherri Flemming, County Executive
Charles Brotherton, County Executive